

GEOGRAPHIC SPECIFIC INFORMATION SEARCH SYSTEM AND METHOD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to search systems and methods for geographic specific information. More particularly, the present invention relates to computer software and systems for listing and locating housing in specific geographic regions.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When moving to a new city or location, one of the most difficult tasks confronting the person or family moving is finding desirable housing. This problem is particularly relevant for college students who often times live a great distance from where they attend school. Furthermore, often times college students must do without automobiles and must therefore find housing in very specific on or near campus areas. Apartment search professionals are generally available in most locations, however, difficulties often arise in accurately describing the type and location of housing desired. Furthermore, viewing and applying for housing can often be difficult when moving from a location remote from the desired area. It is also difficult to determine exactly where available apartments are located with respect to desired locations and/or landmarks.

Other methods for locating available housing include reviewing the "Want" ads of a local paper or local bulletin board or actually making a personal trip to the desired location to personally search in desired areas. However, these methods are often expensive and time consuming and do not solve any of the problems discussed above.

A large part of lessors and property managers duties entail advertising and showing available housing. It is especially important for lessors and property managers to keep advertisements and listings current as the availability status of the properties change. This is especially difficult since most daily newspapers require several days advance notice for placing and/or changing advertisements. It is also very time consuming for property managers to take applicants on "walk throughs". The property manager must make an appointment to meet the applicant at a time convenient for both the applicant and property manager, as well as travel to the apartment to conduct the "walk through".

With the increasing power of the personal computer and computer equipment, the Internet, particularly the World Wide Web, has become a very valuable resource of information. It is commonplace for college students to have university accounts which provide access to the Internet as part of the students tuition. Furthermore, businesses have been coming "on-line" with increasing interest, exploring the commercial aspects of the Internet.

Thus, there is a need for an improved system and method of finding geographic specific information, such as housing available in a specific geographic area. There is also a need for an improved system and method of updating the status of housing listings in an efficient and timely manner. There is a further need for an improved system and method for showing and seeing available housing.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a geographic specific information search system and method wherein the user narrows searches to specific geographic areas by selecting, on graphical maps, specific areas of interest. A series of

interactive graphical maps are recursively selected and displayed to narrow the geographic search to individual pieces of information at specified locations. The user can view the individual pieces of information and form requests for additional information which are forwarded to the information supplier for response.

One object of the present invention is to provide an improved system and method of finding geographic specific information, such as housing available in a specific geographic area

Another object of the present invention is to provide an improved system and method of updating the status of housing listings in an efficient and timely manner.

Still another object of the present invention is to provide an improved system and method for showing and seeing available housing.

In order to achieve the foregoing objects, the present invention provides a World Wide Web home page and associated scripts as well as an information database for displaying and searching housing information by geographic area. The user accesses the web page through the Internet using any standard Internet browser. The geographic search region is defined by the user by selecting areas on a series of interactive graphical maps. The search region is narrowed to individual quadrants, wherein specific points of interest are displayed. Information describing the specific points of interest is held in a database and can be accessed by the user selecting the corresponding point on the displayed quadrant. The user is allowed to build a list of points of interest for which the user desires additional information and the list along with information about the user can be submitted for response. Appropriate property managers are automatically notified of a request for additional information and user information through Internet e-mail or other appropriate means and the property managers individually respond to each request.

The information database comprises a collection of data submitted by lessors and property managers listing available housing or other geographic specific information of interest to the systems users. The property managers are registered and given an ID and password which they can use to logon to the database portion of the system. The system verifies the property manager's ID and password and allows the property managers to access and edit database entries submitted earlier by the property manager. This allows the property manager an efficient and timely means for keeping information current. For property managers not having an Internet e-mail address or not wishing to receive requests for additional information via Internet e-mail, special property manager home pages may be established for holding the requests for additional information and other information for the property manager. The property manager is allowed access to their individual home pages through the use of the provided ID and password. The property manager is also allowed to insert new points of interest by selecting a specific area on a quadrant map and supplying information corresponding to the selected point. The new point of interest is then added to a quadrant map containing the previous points of interest and the point information is entered into the database for user retrieval later.

Each database entry can be configured to include information ranging from text describing the individual locations to digitized still and moving pictures of the locations. Through the use of this system, a user could locate housing available in very specific geographic areas. The user can select individual properties in each desired region and view